

FLIGHT JACKET

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June 4, 2004

3rd MAW changes hands in Al Asad

Story by Staff Sgt. Houston F. White Jr.

MWHS-3 Combat Correspondent

ALASAD, Iraq - Leadership was smoothly transitioned here as Maj. Gen. James F. Amos relinquished command to Maj. Gen. Keith J. Stalder during the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing change of command May 29.

For Amos, a University of Idaho graduate, the ceremony marked the bittersweet conclusion to an eventful tour of duty with 3rd MAW, which saw him deploy the unit to Iraq multiple times in support of the global war on terrorism.

"My feelings are mixed about leaving because I feel like we haven't completed Operation Iraqi Freedom yet," remarked Amos. "We certainly finished Iraqi Freedom I, but we're not done with Iraqi Freedom II, and my thoughts are that as long as Marines and Sailors from this wing are here, I ought to be here with them.

"On one hand, I'm excited about the potential job I have been nominated for at (II Marine Expeditionary Force)," he added, "but the other side, it leaves an ache in my heart because I feel like I'm leaving the Marines and Sailors prematurely."

Upon assuming control of 3rd MAW in August 2002, Amos said he originally set his sights on building upon the solid foundation that was already put in place by the previous commander.

"When I joined the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing it was already in great shape," he explained. "(Retired Maj. Gen.) Charlie Bolden had done all the right things before I got here and the leadership was there, so to be quite honest, there wasn't much that needed to be changed right away."

According to Amos, his objectives changed after he was summoned at the behest of Gen. Michael W. Hagee,

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Maj. Gens. James F. Amos (left) and Keith J. Stalder shake hands shortly after the 3rd MAW change of command ceremony at Al Asad, Iraq. Photo by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III

Convoys look to the sky for support



Perched behind a machine gun in a UH-1N Huey helicopter, Staff Sgt. Mark J. Covill, 29, a crew chief with HMLA-775, surveys the area around a farm near Camp Taqaddum, Iraq, during a reconnaissance patrol May 25. Photo by Lance Cpl. Samuel Bard Valliere

Reserve UH-1N Huey squadron provides bird's eye view of battlefield

Story by Lance Cpl. Samuel Bard Valliere

1st FSSG Combat Correspondent

CAMPTAQADDUM, Iraq - Marine helicopter pilots are using their bird's-eye view to combat concealed obstacles threatening convoys trekking through Iraq to deliver vital supplies to units throughout the country.

Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 775, a reserve unit stationed here supporting the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, is sending its helos to accompany 1st Force Service Support Group convoys as they travel along the Al Anbar Province's dangerous highways.

The soaring sentinels speed ahead of a convoy hoping to set eyes on ambushes and homemade bombs before the vehicles reach them.

The number of convoy escorts has increased since April, when fighting in and around Fallujah kept only necessary convoys on the road, said San Francisco-native Maj. Christopher O'Balle, 34, the squadron's assistant operations officer.

Additionally, the helos were often tasked with high-priority missions such as protecting casualty evacuations and supporting infantry Marines in the city, leaving little time to support supply runs.

May saw a decrease in medical flights, freeing up pilots for the increased convoy escorts, said O'Balle.

The thumping choppers discourage insurgents from setting up traps, said Maj. Rob R. Russell, 37, a pilot who has escorted about 10 convoys.

"It's intimidation, and they can't really defend against it," said 1st Lt. Austin J. Mroczek, Combat Service Support Company 113's motor transportation officer of Marcellus, Mich.

The helicopters aren't all bark, though. The squadron, which is based at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Johnstown, Pa., sends out birds which pack plenty of bite, said Russell, an Oceanside, Calif., resident.

"If the convoy was ambushed, we could provide aerial fire to neutralize the threat and most likely destroy it," said Russell.

That knowledge sits well with the Marines of the 2nd Military Police Battalion, of which two platoons provide security for Combat Service Support Group 15's convoys. The Marines are grateful to receive the help.

"They can see a lot more than we can see. It gives you more of a secure feeling," said 1st Lt. Nicholas P. Bialzik,

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Weekend forecast from Miramar's weather station



84°/63°
Today



82°/63°
Saturday



79°/62°
Sunday

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Recreational mobility kits, books deploy with troops

Marine Corps Community Services sends free games, toys, more than 500 books to units overseas

Story by Cpl. Paul Leicht

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

Deployed Miramar Marines and Sailors with some spare time on their hands at the end of a duty day have a source for recreational equipment and recycled reading material through recreational mobility kits.

“Marine Corps Community Services has been providing mobility kits with recreation equipment and books to deploying units from Miramar,” said Anne Panattoni, Semper Fit director, MCCS.

“Since February, we have put together eight kits and have sent more than 500 books to (3rd Marine Aircraft Wing) Marines in Iraq, and we have more ready to go now. If a unit about to deploy would like to take one with them, then that unit’s recre-

ational officer should contact us or the Outdoor Adventure Center manager.”

The request for a kit must be submitted in writing at least two weeks prior to deployment and must also outline the approximate length of deployment, according to MCCS1710.12B.

Following the request, the MCCS Outdoor Adventure Center will provide the equipment free of charge for pick up by the unit, said Panattoni.

“The standard kit typically includes things like games, soccer balls, footballs, volleyballs, basketballs, jump ropes, Frisbees, an air pump with needles and miscellaneous paperback books,” explained Panattoni.

“Whatever unit that signs out the equipment is responsible for its return, so if they

loan it out to someone else, then they should return the kit within a week after the unit’s return from deployment.”

Panattoni added that MCCS understands that the kits and things like paperback books are expendable and their return is not required, but MCCS will accept the return of any complete games and books in good condition for reissue to other deploying units.

Deployed Marines and Sailors aboard ship and in more than 20 countries also have another source for books that has been keeping troops entertained and well read.

Founded in 1998 by the late Chief Master Sgt. Fredrick Honeywell, Operation Paperback is a member-supported grassroots organization of family and Internet and personal friends that collect gently used books and send

them to American troops deployed overseas.

According to the organization’s Web site, after six years of operation, Operation Paperback volunteers have sent more than 150,000 books to American troops overseas, earning commendations from the mayor of Baltimore, the governor of Maryland and the United States Junior Chamber of Commerce.

The Miramar Library, home to more than 60,000 titles, also supplies MCCS with old and excess books to put in many of the mobility kits, as well as selections from the Commandant’s Reading List, said Adam Yantorn, librarian, Miramar Library.

For more information on recreational kits call the Outdoor Adventure Center at 577-4150, or on Operation Paperback, visit <http://operationpaperback.usmilitarysupport.org>.

Defense Department taking steps to prevent vehicle deaths in Iraq

Story by Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - Buckle up your seat belt, and don’t drive too fast. This age-old advice applies as much on the streets of Baghdad as on Main Street USA.

Vehicle accidents - involving both tactical and nontactical vehicles - are the leading cause of noncombat fatalities in Iraq. According to J.T. Coleman from the Army Safety Center at Fort Rucker, Ala., most result from excessive speed and not wearing seat belts.

Since October 2002, motor vehicle accidents killed 49 soldiers and caused 82 soldier injuries in Iraq. Coleman said most accidents occurred in convoys in forward areas, with speed a factor in more than half of the accidents, and failure to use seat belts contributing to the severity of injuries in almost half of all Humvee accidents.

Marine Maj. Nat Fahy, a media officer with Headquarters Marine Corps, said U.S. military drivers in Iraq face other challenges on the road. Local drivers and the current Iraqi highway infrastructure aren’t always held to the same safety standards and practices as in the United States, he said, and sometimes Iraqi drivers take unnecessary risks that threaten U.S. military drivers.

During the first two months of the ground war alone, several Marines also died in vehicle accidents in Iraq. Statistics were not yet available since the Marine Corps began sending troop rotations back to Iraq in March.

In a policy letter sent to the field in February, Army Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez, commander of coalition forces in Iraq, called the loss of lives and equipment due to traffic accidents “unacceptable” and said they’ve cut into combat fighting capabilities.

Sanchez directed combat leaders to conduct risk assessments to identify and assess hazards, then put controls into place to minimize them. “The decision may be to change, alter or cancel the mission,” he said.

Seat belt wear is mandatory, Sanchez said, empha-

sizing that no one has the authority to waive the requirement. In addition, all soldiers and Defense Department civilians are required to wear Kevlar helmets with the chinstrap secured while operating or riding in vehicles while conducting operations, on or off post. All troops must also wear fragmentation protective vests while in vehicles off post.

Coleman said some soldiers have complained that they can’t wear their seat belts because they simply don’t fit over full battle gear, including flak vest. In response, the Army is fielding longer seat belts for vehicles in or bound for Southwest Asia, he said, and Army engineers are developing a five-point harness system similar to that used in some military aircraft.

“There have been no documented cases in which troops have been injured as a result of being unable to respond to hostile action because they were restrained by seat belts,” said Sanchez in his policy letter. “However, there are many documented cases of injuries and fatalities from not wearing seat belts.”

In his policy letter, Sanchez called on convoy commanders to conduct a safety briefing that addresses weapon status and rules of engagement, the route of travel, known hazards, breakdown procedures, how to call for help in an emergency, emergency medical procedures, convoy speed and spacing, as well as post-accident and lost vehicle procedures.

Safeguarding against accidents is “about not becoming complacent,” Sergeant Major of the Army Sgt. Maj. Ken Preston said shortly after coming on board as the Army’s top enlisted soldier. “It’s ensuring soldiers out there follow procedures established in policies, regulations, operating manuals.”

Fahy said vehicle safety remains a top priority in the Marine Corps as well, especially during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He called on Marine drivers to be “more vigilant” and “take extra precautions” while operating vehicles in Iraq.

MIRAMARKS

“What do you do to apply safe driving techniques?”



LANCE CPL. HARRY THOMAS JR.

Administrative Clerk
MWHs-3

“Take the proper precautions. Don’t drink and drive and plan properly before you get behind the wheel.”

CPL. TIMOTHY ROADCAP
Hazardous Material/Safety NCOIC
MWSS-373

“Drive the speed limit and analyze the road ahead of you. Be a defensive driver, but at the same time, be an aggressive driver.”



CPL. FRANK R. BROWN

Box Section NCIOC
Post Office

“Check all of your fluids, make sure there is enough air in your tires, and while you’re driving use your mirrors.”



FLIGHT JACKET

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England applauds ‘Wolfpack’ for safety

Story by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

MAG-16 Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq - Secretary of the Navy Gordon R. England awarded the Aviation Unit Safety Award to Lt. Col. Mark S. Jebens, commanding officer, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 466, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, here May 18.

The squadron reached the 50,000 Class “A” mishap-free hour milestone Jan. 29 while aboard the *USS Boxer* on the way to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The secretary said he was honored to present the award to the squadron while they continued to perform their mission of support here in Iraq.

“I think all of these achievements are important,” he said. “They represent the extraordinary accomplishments above and beyond the ordinary by our men and women, so I’m always privileged to recognize them for their great service. I thank them and congratulate them.”

Since the squadron’s commission into the Marine Corps nearly 20 years ago, Nov. 30, 1984, HMH-466 has never had a class “A” mishap, in training or during operations. HMH-466, nicknamed the “Wolfpack,” is the only CH-53E Super Stallion squadron in the Marine Corps to

have achieved this feat.

Reaching this type of milestone involves many people, claimed Jebens.

“I attribute this to the professional aviators and maintainers,” the Midlothian, Ill., native claimed. “It’s truly been a team effort not just for me, but for all of my predecessors over the years.”

One indispensable part of the squadron is the maintainers, noted Gunnery Sgt. William A. Gearhart, maintenance control

chief, HMH-466. The maintenance Marines help eliminate mechanical variables that might cause a crash, he added.

“Everyone says you get lucky, but you just do maintenance properly,” the Lock Haven, Pa., native claimed. “We have exceptional Marines doing maintenance and exceptional Marines who were here before us.”

The maintenance side of the squadron constantly ensures the planes are safe for

flight, the 32 year old said. They use set schedules and maintenance procedures and strive to rise above those standards, Gearhart added.

Maintenance of the helicopters isn’t the only thing the squadron does to ensure safety, interjected Maj. George R. Maus, director of safety and standardization, HMH-466.

“We’ve always taken safety very seriously,” he said. “It’s not just a department, it’s all the Marines in the squadron. It’s a team effort, bottom line.”

Jebens claimed that to help the squadron remember to take care of each other, they have adopted a motto penned by the author, Rudyard Kipling, known for his novel “The Jungle Book.”

“The strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack,” Kipling wrote in his poem “The Law of the Jungle.”

Jebens said his Marines come together as a team, which has allowed the squadron to prevent any major mishaps. He added that he is honored just to be part of this pack.

“I’m blessed, privileged and fortunate to command this squadron,” he concluded. “I’m humbled to be part of this legacy and the great professionals that make up the ‘Wolfpack.’”



Secretary of the Navy Gordon R. England speaks to the Marines of HMH-466 at Al Asad, Iraq, May 18 after the Aviation Unit Safety Award presentation. Photo by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

On second thought ...

Taking Chance

Commentary by Lt. Col. Mike Strobl

MCB Quantico, Va.

EDITOR’S NOTE: *This is the first of a four-part series featuring a memoir written by Lt. Col. Mike Strobl who was assigned to escort the remains of Pfc. Chance Phelps, a casualty of Operation Iraqi Freedom, to his home in Dubois, Wyo. Phelps, 19, died April 9 from hostile fire in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. He was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division.*

Chance Phelps was wearing his Saint Christopher medal when he was killed on Good Friday. Eight days later, I handed the medallion to his mother. I didn’t know Chance before he died. Today, I miss him.

Over a year ago, I volunteered to escort the remains of Marines killed in Iraq should the need arise. The military provides a uniformed escort for all casualties to ensure they are delivered safely to the next of kin and are treated with dignity and respect along the way.

Thankfully, I hadn’t been called on to be an escort since Operation Iraqi Freedom began. The first few weeks of April, however, had been a tough month for the Marines. On the Monday after Easter I was reviewing Department of Defense press releases when I saw that a Pfc. Chance Phelps was killed in action outside of Baghdad. The press release listed his hometown - the same town I’m from. I notified our battalion adjutant and told him that should the duty to escort Pfc. Phelps fall to our battalion, I would take him.

See **CHANCE**, page 8

Remembering D-Day sacrifices

Commentary by Cpl. Paul Leicht

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

The 60th anniversary of the allied invasion of Normandy is this Sunday, June 6. One of America’s greatest days in military history has been the subject of countless books, articles, movies and television shows.

On Monday night during a marathon of Memorial Day war movies on various channels, I watched Tom Selleck’s portrayal of Eisenhower in “Ike: Countdown to D-Day” on Arts and Entertainment. While initially it was hard for me to look past the Hawaiian P.I. Thomas Magnum, I found the performance to be commanding, showing the weighty decisions Ike faced as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.

But out of all the D-Day related articles, books,

See **SACRIFICES**, page 11

Send your letters or opinions to the Flight Jacket editor. Include your name, rank and unit, and send to: mcmeence@miramar.usmc.mil.

Presidential address indicates troops will stay



President George W. Bush welcomes the new members of Iraq’s interim government during a statement in the Rose Garden June 1. Official White House photo

Story by Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – President George W. Bush praised the new Iraqi interim government in a White House press conference Tuesday, saying it possesses “the talent, commitment and the resolve to guide Iraq through the challenges that lie ahead.”

He said U.S. troops will remain in Iraq to help maintain order and stability and help the Iraqi government set up security forces.

He said the U.S. forces in the country will remain under U.S. control.

“The American people need to be assured that if our troops are in ... harm’s way, they will be able to defend themselves without having to check with anybody else other than their commander,” he said.

“At the same time, I can assure the Iraqi citizens as well as our friends in Europe, that we have done these kind of security arrangements before. Witness Afghanistan. There’s a sovereign government in Afghanistan, there are U.S. troops and coalition troops there, and they’re working very well together.”

Bush said that Iraqi security forces will have their own chain of command. Iraqis, not coalition commanders or Americans, will command the Iraqi army. The president praised the role that U.N. special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi played in choosing the men and women who will be in the interim government.

Bush called Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi a strong

leader who “has always been an Iraqi patriot.”

The president said he had “zero” input into Brahimi’s decision on interim Iraqi President Ghazi al-Yawar, an engineer from northern Iraq.

The 33-member cabinet contains members from all over Iraq. There are six women in the cabinet, and all major ethnic groups and religions are represented.

“The foremost tasks of this new interim government will be to prepare Iraq for a national election no later than January of next year and to work with our coalition to provide the security that will make that election possible,” Bush said. “That election will choose a transitional National Assembly, the first freely elected, truly representative national governing body in Iraq’s history.”

The president said he spoke with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan about a Security Council resolution that will “express international support for Iraq’s interim government, reaffirm the world’s security commitment to the Iraqi people and encourage other U.N. members to join in the effort of building a free Iraq.”

Bush said that many challenges remain. He told reporters that violence in Iraq will probably increase as the handover occurs. “The killers know that Iraq is the central front in the war on terror,” Bush said. “The return of tyranny to Iraq would embolden the terrorists, leading to more bombings, more beheadings and more murders of the innocent around the world.”

He said that a free Iraq will be “a decisive blow to terrorism at the heart of its power, and a victory for the civilized world and for the security of America.”

Deployed troops pause to remember fallen comrades

Story by Lance Cpl. Samuel Bard Valliere

1st FSSG Combat Correspondent

CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq - Deployed Marines, Sailors and soldiers gathered here to remember fallen comrades on Memorial Day May 31.

The outdoor observance included remarks from Brig. Gen. Richard S. Kramlich, the 1st Force Service Support Group's commanding general. The general said young people serving now are the "next great generation," drawing parallels to World War II veterans, who fought for nearly four years and suffered hundreds of thousands of casualties fighting their generation's war.

Today's youth, he said, are no different. The general explained that today's young people don't get the credit they deserve for sacrificing as much as they have in their own generation's war. He added that we cannot lose this war because the freedom and democracy we enjoy as Americans must be protected.

"We know our cause," he said. "Our mission is righteous.

We know what our country stands for and what our Constitution stands for. Men have died for that cause this year, last year and they will again next year."

Following the general's speech, the names of 79 I Marine Expeditionary Force personnel, who have died since Marines assumed responsibility of Iraq's Al Anbar Province earlier this year, were read. After the eulogy, Marines fired a 21-gun salute toward the mid-morning sun. To bring the ceremony to a close, a small stereo quietly played "Taps."

The service moved Sgt. Ruben S. Valenzuela, a 29-year-old inspector with the group.

"It touched me," said the National City, Calif., native after the ceremony. "A lot of people come here with the intention of just doing their time, but they don't realize the sacrifices they have to make."

The ceremony was not the first event held to recognize Memorial Day here. Several hundred servicemembers here ran 5 kilometers May 29 to honor the fallen troops.

More than 800 U.S. service men and women have been killed supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom since March 19, 2003.



Marines and Sailors of 1st FSSG bow their heads in prayer during a Memorial Day ceremony at Camp Taqaddum, Iraq, May 31. The ceremony included a reading of the names of the 79 I Marine Expeditionary Force personnel who have died in Iraq since the Marines assumed responsibility of the Al Anbar Province earlier this year. *Photo by Lance Cpl. Samuel Bard Valliere*

Fleet Week run instills sense of camaraderie between services

Story by Cpls. Elsa Portillo and
Glen R. Springstead

New York Public Affairs

NEW YORK CITY - Marines, Coast Guardsmen and New York Port Authority police officers joined forces to participate in a motivational run May 27. Just one of the many events that took place in New York City during Fleet Week 2004.

The run not only commemorated those lost in the World Trade Center attacks but also instilled a sense of camaraderie between services and civilians.

"I thought it was symbolic of the true spirit of our Americans and our military and how we all group together as one to fight this war," said Sergeant Rick Munnelly, police officer, Port Authority Trans Hudson (PATH). "I speak on behalf of our department, and we are very proud to see everybody here."

The participants began by loading up onto a ferry to begin their run at the riverfront. Once at the starting point, Marines got their blood pumping by doing push-ups, jumping jacks and other warm-up exercises.

Led by the Marine Corps colors, the runners took off with shouts down the line and unit flags in hand. The Marines cadence

echoed off the tall city buildings, and other participants chimed in with their own versions.

Runners finished up the event by passing by the Policemen's Memorial and then heading to Ground Zero, the final destination.

Upon reaching the hallowed ground that was once the World Trade Center, the fatigued runners neatly reformed their ranks to pay homage to the fallen who could not be present. Passersby, hustling on their way to work, put their busy schedules aside to join the servicemembers and police officers in prayer and a moment of silence led by the force chaplain.

"It's good to see Marines getting pumped up," said Marine 1st Lt. James L. Carter, Guns Platoon commander, A Battery, 1st Battalion, 10th Marine Regiment. "It was a true reminder of what we are fighting for. I think it's good for the New Yorkers to see the Navy, Marine Corps Team out here giving them a brief snapshot of the job we are doing as a result of the attacks of September 11."

Emotions ran high as the growing crowd looked on at the proud men and women who volunteer their lives to the protection of the American people. The ceremony put their hard work into perspective, according to Carter.

"It's something that you often find yourself thinking about in the desert," he added. "You always wonder if anyone really cares, and it turns out that they really do appreciate and recognize the sacrifices we make for them."

Feelings of pride ran through all service members present at the event, according to Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class Jesus Gonzales, Boatswain's Mate, USCGC Reliance.

"This was a very emotional time for us, especially being part of the unit guarding the New York harbor after the attacks," Gonzales said. "To see everyone come together again was very emotional."

The run may have been for only a short time, but the feelings of camaraderie and patriotism will last much longer.

"We can't give up, and I don't think with the tremendous amount of spirit shown here today we will allow that," Munnelly said.



Marines from 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, make their way to the Ground Zero site during a motivational run. *Photo by Cpl. Glen R. Springstead*

KC-130 Hercules delivers goods to troops

Story by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

MAG-16 Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq - The air was stifling inside the KC-130 Hercules aircraft as the loud hum of its rotors signaled the approach of the giant cargo plane.

The zero illumination night lowered the threat of enemy contact around the drop zone as the aircraft slowed to 140 knots and gained altitude to reach 800 feet above ground level.

The two loadmasters readied themselves inside the cargo hold. When they received confirmation from the pilots that they were flying over the DZ, they pressed the button and opened the doors, releasing the pressure inside the hold and releasing their precious cargo of supplies out into the night air.

Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadrons 352 and 234, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, teamed up to perform their first aerial supply drop since both of them returned to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom a few short months ago.

A crew comprised of Marines from both squadrons dropped food, water, oil and other essentials shortly after midnight May 20. The supplies they dropped on an 800-foot DZ, somewhere in the Al Anbar Province of Western Iraq, were intended for a Marine unit conducting operations in the area.

The drop itself was essential for the Marines who received it, said Lt. Col. Jeffrey V. Young, mission and aircraft

commander, VMGR-234.

“It is huge, it allows the Marines in the field to stay in the field,” the Southlake, Texas, native claimed. “It helps them survive because they don’t have to travel to resupply.”

The aircraft has several Marines with different military occupational specialties onboard working toward one common goal during a mission such as this.

There are the aircraft commander, pilot, navigator, flight engineer, mechanic and the loadmasters.

The aircraft commander is the person in charge of the flight and is responsible for the personnel and cargo while in flight.

The pilot is responsible for the skillful manipulation of the aircraft ensuring the safe passage of cargo and personnel.

In the past, navigators have guided crews to their destinations using information gathered from celestial tracking. Because of advances in technology, navigators have evolved into tactical systems operators, claimed Staff Sgt. Joshua M. Wieger, tactical systems operator, VMGR-352.



A cargo hold full of container delivery system bundles gets sucked out of the open back ramp of a KC-130 Hercules May 20. The crewmembers from VMGR-352 and 234 delivered the bundles containing food, water, oil and other necessities for a mechanized Marine unit in the Al Anbar Province of Iraq. Photo by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

The systems operator uses grid-coordinate information from the unit receiving the cargo to aid the pilots in their job, he said.

“They’ll give us coordinates,” he explained. “I’ll line the pilots up to the DZ as best as I can with those and information on the wind, terrain, and known enemy locations.”

Before, during and after the flight, the loadmasters work tirelessly to secure the load and prevent it from shifting. They also open the back ramp of the airplane and make sure the cargo exits the plane without incident, claimed Staff Sgt. Martin S. Lynch, loadmaster, VMGR-234.

“We do all necessary in-flight checks so we don’t have any malfunctions,” the Albany, Ore., native revealed. “We want a smooth, successful aerial delivery of the equipment.”

While the loadmasters make their rounds with the cargo, the flight engineer and mechanic ensure the aircraft itself is functioning properly, said Staff Sgt. Timothy A. Ulrich, flight engineer, VMGR-234.

“Between myself and the mechanic, we do all the daily and turnaround inspections, refueling and maintenance,” the Quarryville, Pa., native said. “We maintain all the systems and fix anything that breaks.”

With all the moving parts and different personnel tasked with different jobs, knowing how each of the other crewmembers works is essential, according to Young.

While in country, the two Hercules squadrons started working as one to accomplish their mission. For the drop, the crew was split almost completely in half,



Cpl. John L. Sayler, flight mechanic, VMGR-234 heads out to inspect a KC-130 Hercules before an aerial resupply drop,- May 19. Photo by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

Young mentioned.

“Working with half a 352 crew and 234 crew is a nonissue,” he described. “We know our job and do it. We work well together.”

The patchwork crew melded into a cohesive team that dropped the bundle without a hitch. Young added that the importance of each person on the crew is directly related to the success of the mission.

“It’s a team effort,” the San Diego native noted. “Everyone has a job and is important. That’s why we’re so successful.”

The crew’s teamwork paid off with the success of the first aerial cargo drop for the squadrons since their return to Iraq.

The crews support the guys on the ground, noted Wieger. No matter what that entails, the squadrons support them with whatever they have to, in order to help the guy on the ground make it.

“There are a lot of people who think they are better than the ‘grunts’ because they’re in the wing or vice versa,” Wieger concluded. “I don’t subscribe to that. They’re on the ground fighting.

“We’re there to support (the infantry) and if they need something I’d be more than happy to hand-deliver it if I had to,” he added.

Metalworkers cut, burn, melt their way to success in Iraq

Story by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III

MWHS-3 Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq - The Marines of Marine Wing Support Squadron 273, Marine Wing Support Group 37, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, arrived here in February with one thing in mind, supporting the Marines and Sailors of 3rd MAW with anything they need.

The metalworkers of MWSS-273 maintenance are here not only to assist, they are here to design and build anything a unit needs that requires heat, sweat and several hundred volts of electricity to make.

The metalworkers have been busier than almost any other group of Marines here, despite the fact that there are only two of them.

Sgt. Philip J. Thornton, a 24-year-old Deltona, Fla., native, and Lance Cpl. Jeremy A. Gray, a 19-year-old Gretna, Va., native, both metalworkers with MWSS-273, are a two-man team with creative ideas and the technical proficiency of men far beyond their age.

“We have a trade that does not require a technical manual to tell you how to do something,” said Gray. “But that means we have to know our job well enough to not need the manuals. We have to be creative enough to make something out of nothing.”

Constantly busy, the two Marines have completed more than 150 tasks since arriving in theater and still have a laundry list of assignments to complete.

“These Marines have done everything from gates to door latches and plumbing work,” said Gunnery Sgt. Brett C. Scheuer, maintenance chief, MWSS-273 and 35-year-old Buffalo, N.Y., native. “They have

everyone from around the base coming to them for projects.”

According to Thornton, the job is something he loves to do and having a younger Marine to teach makes it especially meaningful.

“I have been teaching Gray field-expedient ways to do things and the ins-and-outs of the (military occupational specialty),” said Thornton. “He is coming along pretty well and learning a lot since we have been here.”

Gray, a young warrior with motivation to spare, said he enjoys his job and would not trade it for anything else.

“This is the best MOS in the Marine Corps,” he said. “The Marine Corps has taught me a trade that I can carry with me a long way. I can always progress and get better.”

Thornton, an experienced and talented metalworker, has been welding for the Marine Corps for more than six years and is encountering obstacles here he is not used to at his home base of Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, S.C.

“The biggest difference between here and there is the amount of adapting and overcoming we have to do here,” he said. “Different obstacles, like not having the right tool for the right job happens but we work our way around them.”

Although Gray’s experience does not extend as far as Thornton’s, Scheuer believes the two make an excellent team.

“If I had to pick my ‘A’ team, they would be on it,” he said. “They are truly the best at what they do. They are the most proficient and technically sound duty experts at what they do.”



Lance Cpl. Jeremy A. Gray, metalworker with the maintenance section for MWSS-273, welds a makeshift boiling pot to test a thermostat in Al Asad, Iraq, May 20. Photo by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III



MACG-38 bids farewell to commander

Col. Ron R. McFarland, outgoing commanding officer, Marine Air Control Group 38, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, addresses Marines and Sailors during the MACG-38 change of command in Al Asad, Iraq, May 18. McFarland relinquished his position to Col. Jonathan G. Miclot. *Photo by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III*

CONVOY, continued from page 1

26, a platoon commander in the battalion.

Marines riding in the convoy's vehicles also appreciate the beefed-up security.

“(Air support) is invaluable in case we get hit,” said Lance Cpl. Richard E. Leonard, a 20-year-old radio operator with CSSB-15 and Phoenix native. “It’s good to have the eyes in the sky.”

Preparation for such joint ventures began in January, when the 1st FSSG began practicing convoy-escort procedures with

the 3rd MAW’s pilots during Exercise Desert Talon at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz.

“Basically, it taught us how to do what we’re doing now,” said Mroczek of the exercise. “It helped us know what the pilots are thinking and vice versa.”

There have been fewer enemy attacks during escorted supply runs, a fact he said serves as evidence that the Wing's support is effective.

“Every time I’ve had air on a convoy, I’ve never had any problems with attacks,” said Bialzik, a native of Rosholt, Wis.

CHANCE, continued from page 4

I didn’t hear back the rest of Monday and all day Tuesday until 6 p.m. The battalion duty noncommissioned officer called my cell phone and said I needed to be ready to leave for Dover Air Force Base at 7 p.m. in order to escort the remains of Pfc. Phelps.

Before leaving for Dover I called the major who had the task of informing Phelps’s parents of his death.

The major said the funeral was going to be in Dubois, Wyoming. (It turned out that Pfc. Phelps only lived in my hometown for his senior year of high school.) I had never been to Wyoming and had never heard of Dubois.

With two other escorts from Quantico, I got to Dover AFB at 11:30 p.m. Tuesday night. First thing Wednesday we reported to the mortuary at the base.

In the escort lounge there were about half a dozen Army soldiers and about an equal number of Marines waiting to meet up with “their” remains for departure. Pfc. Phelps was not ready, however, and I was told to come back Thursday. Now at Dover with nothing to do and a solemn mission ahead, I began to get depressed.

I was wondering about Chance Phelps. I didn’t know anything about him; not even what he looked like. I wondered about his family and what it would be like to meet them. I did pushups in my room until I couldn’t do any more.

On Thursday morning I reported back to the mortuary. This time there was a new group of Army escorts and a couple of the Marines who had been there Wednesday. There was also an Air Force captain there to escort his brother home to San Diego.

We received a brief covering our duties, the proper handling of the remains, the procedures for draping a flag over a casket, and of course, the paperwork attendant to our task. We were shown pictures of the shipping container and told that each one contained a flag in addition to the casket.

I was given an extra flag since Phelps’s parents were divorced, this way they would each get one. I didn’t like the idea of stuffing the flag into my luggage but I couldn’t see carrying a large flag, folded for presentation to the next of kin, through an airport while in my Alpha uniform. It barely fit into my suitcase.

It turned out that I was the last escort to leave Thursday. This meant that I repeatedly got to participate in the small ceremonies that mark all departures from the Dover AFB mortuary.

Most of the remains are taken from Dover AFB by hearse to the airport in Philadelphia for air transport to their final destination. When the remains of a servicemember are loaded onto a hearse and ready to leave the Dover mortuary there is an announcement made over the building’s intercom system.

With the announcement, all servicemembers working at the mortuary, regardless of service branch, stop work and form up along the driveway to render a slow ceremonial salute as the hearse departs. Escorts also participated in each formation until it was their time to leave.

On this day there were some civilian workers doing construction on the mortuary grounds. As each hearse passed, they would stop working and place their hard hats over their hearts. This was my first sign that my mission with Pfc. Phelps was larger than the Marine Corps and that his family and friends

were not grieving alone.

Eventually I was the last escort remaining in the lounge. The Marine master gunnery sergeant in charge of the Marine liaison there came to see me. He had Chance Phelps’s personal effects.

He removed each item; a large watch, a wooden cross with a lanyard, two loose dog tags, two dog tags on a chain and a Saint Christopher medal on a silver chain. Although we had been briefed that we might be carrying some personal effects of the deceased, this set me aback. Holding his personal effects, I was starting to get to know Chance Phelps.

Finally we were ready. I grabbed my bags and went outside. I was somewhat startled when I saw the shipping container loaded three-quarters of the way in to the back of a black Chevy Suburban that had been modified to carry such cargo.

This was the first time I saw my “cargo,” and I was surprised at how large the shipping container was. The master gunnery sergeant and I verified that the name on the container was Phelps’ then they pushed him the rest of the way in and we left.

Now it was Pfc. Phelps’ turn to receive the military - and construction worker’s - honors. He was finally moving toward home.

As I chatted with the driver on the hour-long trip to Philadelphia, it became clear that he considered it an honor to be able to contribute in getting Chance home.

He offered his sympathy to the family. I was glad to finally be moving yet apprehensive about what things would be like at the airport.

I didn’t want this package to be treated like ordinary cargo, but I knew that the simple logistics of moving around a box this large would have to overrule my preferences.

When we got to the Northwest Airlines cargo terminal at the Philadelphia airport, the cargo handler and hearse driver pulled the shipping container onto a loading bay while I stood to the side and executed a slow salute. Once Chance was safely in the cargo area, and I was satisfied that he would be treated with due care and respect, the hearse driver drove me over to the passenger terminal and dropped me off.

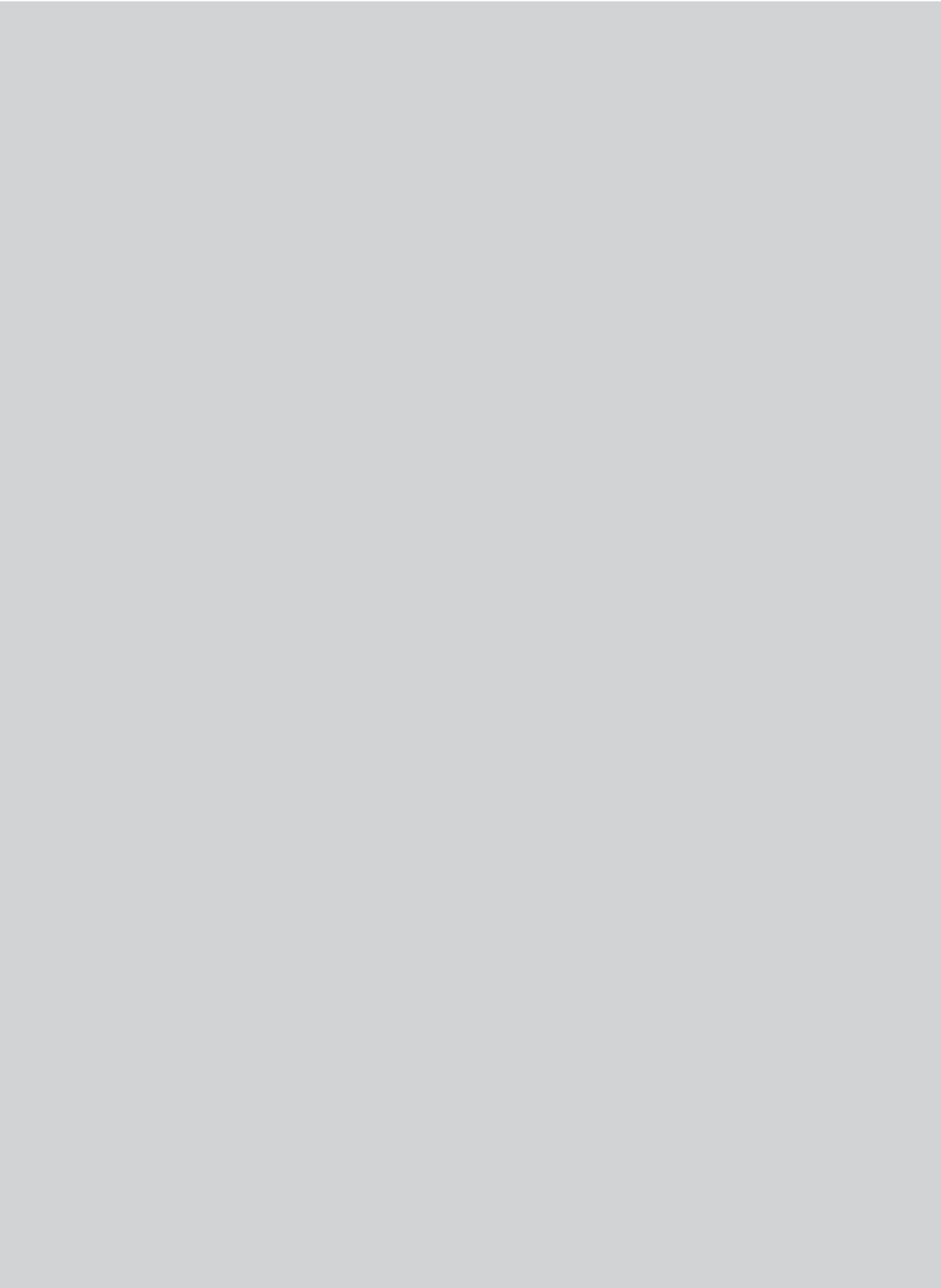
As I walked up to the ticketing counter in my uniform, a Northwest employee started to ask me if I knew how to use the automated boarding pass dispenser. Before she could finish another ticketing agent interrupted her. He told me to go straight to the counter then explained to the woman that I was a military escort. She seemed embarrassed.

The woman behind the counter already had tears in her eyes as I was pulling out my government travel voucher. She struggled to find words but managed to express her sympathy for the family and thank me for my service. She upgraded my ticket to first class.

After clearing security, I was met by another Northwest Airline employee at the gate. She told me a representative from cargo would be up to take me down to the tarmac to observe the movement and loading of Pfc. Phelps. I hadn’t really told any of them what my mission was but they all knew.

When the man from the cargo crew met me he too struggled for words. On the tarmac, he told me stories of his childhood as a military brat and repeatedly told me that he was sorry for my loss. I was starting to understand that even here in Philadelphia far away from Chance’s hometown, people were mourning with his family.

Pick up next week’s *Flight Jacket* to read part two of “Taking Chance.”



Chapel weekly schedule of events

Holy Family Catholic Community

- ◆ Mass: 11 a.m. Sunday, 11:30 a.m. weekdays.
- ◆ Rosary: 10:30 a.m. Sunday.
- ◆ Confession: 10:15 a.m. Sunday or for appointments call Father Berchmanz at 577-1333.
- ◆ Religious classes for children for first communion, confirmation: 9:30-10:45 a.m. Sunday.
- ◆ Youth gathering and planning following mass Sunday.
- ◆ Baptism: Normally the first Sunday of the month. Call the chaplain's office for details.
- ◆ Marriage: Call the chaplain for details at least six months before wedding.
- ◆ Instruction in the Catholic faith (RCIA). Call the chaplain's office for details.
- ◆ Scripture Class: 7 p.m. Wednesday in the Chapel classroom.
- ◆ Choir Practice: 6 p.m. Wednesday in the Main Chapel.

Liturgical Christian

- ◆ Sunday: Choir rehearsal at 9 a.m.
Liturgical worship at 9:30 a.m.
Adult/Youth/Children bible study at 10:45 a.m.
- ◆ Tuesday: Morning prayer group (Room 4) at 6 a.m.
Contemporary Gospel Service at 7:30 p.m.
- ◆ Wednesday: Crafts and conversation at 9 a.m. Free childcare provided.
Women's bible study at 10:45 a.m.
Baptist service at 7 p.m.
- ◆ Thursday: Liturgical choir rehearsal at 7:30 p.m.
- ◆ Friday: Baptist bible study at 7 p.m.

Jewish

- ◆ First Friday of the month at MCRD San Diego at 7 p.m.
- ◆ Last Friday of the month in Edson Range Chapel Camp Pendleton at 7:30 p.m.

For more information during work hours call the Chaplain's Office at 577-1333 or the command duty officer after hours at 577-1141.

Changes of Command

VMFA(AW)-225:

Lt. Col. John Rupp relinquished Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 225 to Lt. Col. William T. Van Atten in a change of command ceremony May 27.

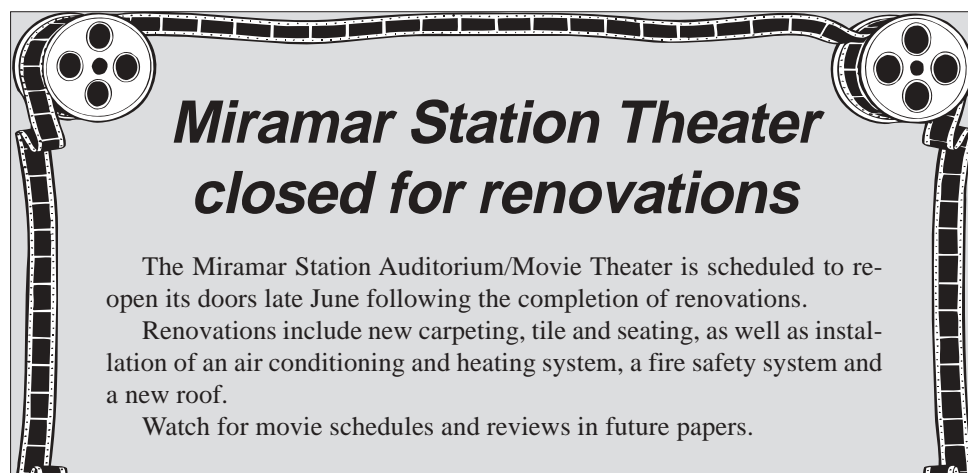
VMFA-314:

Lt. Col. William G. Waldron will relinquish Marine Fighter Attack

Squadron 314 to Lt. Col. Russell W. Emons Jr. in a change of command ceremony today.

MALS-11:

Lt. Col. Daniel J. Gillan will relinquish Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 11 to Lt. Col. Shaugnessy Reynolds in a change of command ceremony June 9.



Miramar Station Theater
closed for renovations

The Miramar Station Auditorium/Movie Theater is scheduled to re-open its doors late June following the completion of renovations. Renovations include new carpeting, tile and seating, as well as installation of an air conditioning and heating system, a fire safety system and a new roof.

Watch for movie schedules and reviews in future papers.

Modified gate hours

The East Gate will now be closed from 12-5 a.m. Flightline gates 5 and 22 will be fully automated with all access being granted through card swipes.

Military Appreciation

Navy Federal Credit Union will be hosting a military appreciation day Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Bowling Center parking lot.

The event will feature free food, music and giveaways. For more information call 577-6365 or visit www.mccsmiramar.com.

Armed Forces Taekwondo Team

Semper Fit is currently seeking resumes for the Armed Forces Taekwondo team set to compete in the Army Invitational/CISM Taekwondo trials held Sept. 22-27 at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.

All applications must be submitted to the Athletic Office no later than July 30. For more information call the Athletics Office at 577-4127/7700.

3-on-3 basketball

Earn points for the 101 Days of Summer by participating in the 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament. Games will be held from July 19-23 at the Semper Fit Center gymnasium

from 11:15 a.m. to 1 p.m. Entry fee is \$20 per team and \$2 per person interested in participating in the Slam Dunk and Drug-Free Throw contests. Sign-up deadline is July 14. For more info, contact Alisa Hertzler at 577-6283.

Parenting the Toddler

The New Parent Support Program is offering a Parenting the Toddler class. The two-session class will be held June 9 and 16 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the LINKS House, building 2273. The class will be geared towards parents of children ages 18 months to three years, and will cover topics such as growth and development, discipline, temper tantrums, stimulating play activities, safety, toilet training, bedtime routines and eating habits. For more information or to register call 577-9812.

Flight Jacket survey

The Flight Jacket is currently holding a reader survey to better serve our readers. The survey will allow readers to express what they would like to see more or less of in the paper, delivery options and other areas of concern.

The survey can be taken online at www.miramar.usmc.mil/miramar/pao_ffsurvey.htm.

It can also be accessed through the hyperlink under the online version of the Flight Jacket at <http://www.miramar.usmc.mil>. A paper copy is also available at the Public Affairs Office in building 2257. For more information call the Public Affairs Office at 577-6000.

L.I.N.K.S. meetings

L.I.N.K.S. will meet tomorrow from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., and again from 6 to 9 p.m. July 6-8. To register or for more information call 577-4810.

Postal overload

Remember to check your military mail box daily and to check out with the post office when going on leave or TAD for 15 or more days at a time.



For information on deployed 3rd MAW Marines and Sailors, call the Dictaphone at 1-877-616-8762. For more information, call 577-7397/7294.

MAW,
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who at the time was the commanding general of I Marine Expeditionary Force, to begin preparing for the likely overseas battle against terrorism that loomed on the horizon.

“My goals then shifted to purely being able to get 3rd MAW focused on warfighting as a wing,” he said. “We spent from August (2002) until we deployed in February (2003) realigning all of our training to focus purely on the Iraqi scenario.”

Paramount amongst the dazzling array of missions Amos was able to accomplish during his 3rd MAW term of leadership was the movement to and from the Persian Gulf theatre in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom on more than one occasion.

“I don’t think many general officers get an opportunity to deploy an air group or air wing (to combat),” Amos offered. “I had deployed before, but not on that large of a scale.

In addition to providing him with an immense sense of fulfillment, the deployment of 3rd MAW to a combat environment educated the seasoned aviator as well.

“The biggest lesson I learned was just how difficult it is to get a command as large as the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing and move it beyond a

(Combined Arms Exercise) mindset,” explained Amos.

“It was a lot harder than I thought to get a command this size to the next level, where you really understand that people are going to die and you have to be prepared for everything that could take place on the battlefield,” he added.

Accepting the reins of the “Warfighting Wing of the Marine Corps” from Amos, the new 3rd MAW commanding general made it clear that doing so is both a tribute he is grateful for and a challenge he looks forward to.

“It is something I appreciate to the fullest, and I am both honored and humbled by the opportunity,” he added. “I promise (the Marines and Sailors of 3rd MAW) a level of leadership that is commensurate with your tremendous accomplishments, and I will challenge you to improve upon them every day.”

At the forefront of those giving praise to his replacement was Amos, who himself has shared a lengthy friendship with Stalder for well over two decades.

“I’ve known Major General Keith Stalder since we were captains,” said the 34-year Marine Corps veteran. “We’ve never been assigned to the same air group, but we’ve always been friends and have known each other since we were youngsters. He is highly capable and will do a superb job.”

SACIFICES,
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movies old or new and 60th anniversary edition releases (yes, there is a new “Saving Private Ryan” commemorative edition with extended footage and other goodies), one book that actually came out last year stands out from the rest and is especially poignant.

On the morning of D-Day, June 6, 1944, a group of young men in the Army’s 29th Infantry Division from the small Virginia town of Bedford waded ashore on the beaches of Normandy.

Those soldiers entered a fierce battle that ultimately took the lives of twenty two of the Bedford’s best 19 within the first few minutes of the seaborne assault. No other American town had suffered a greater loss in a single day of World War II than the farming community of Bedford, now home to the National D-Day Memorial.

“The Bedford Boys: One American Town’s Ultimate D-Day Sacrifice” by British author Alex Kershaw is the first book to tell the story of some of our country’s bravest men and the town they grew up in. Unlike other books on World War II, “The Bedford Boys” focuses on the details from the men’s lives and their

friends and loved ones, not just exclusively on their combat experience.

The book is based on extensive interviews with survivors and relatives from Bedford, in addition to diaries and letters leading up to the fateful day on Omaha Beach. Kershaw crafts an outstanding narrative that makes the book difficult to put down.

The book paints a picture not unlike that of today; a neighborhood of soldiers with girlfriends, wives and mothers and fathers left behind while they went from basic training to being stationed in England after activation with other National Guardsmen in the 29th to Omaha’s bloody beach.

So as our nation approaches another D-Day anniversary, no more significant simply because it ends in a zero, the story of the sacrifice of good, old-fashioned American boys from a little town called Bedford becomes a timeless reminder of the human cost of war.

And even as we are in the midst of bringing freedom to another group of people, it must be earned by everyone for its value to endure the test of time. The memory of our past victories and sacrifices have given our country, and much of the world, 60 years of inspiration.